



Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Jesse White-Fresé, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers. I am accompanied by JoAnn Eaccarino, President of the Board of Directors.

I am here today to testify in opposition to HB 6350, *An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2015*. The Governor's budget proposes nearly a half-million dollars in cuts each year in baseline operational funding for SBHCs, in addition to the proposed complete elimination of funding for new or expanded Centers in the educational Alliance Districts.

In the last fiscal year, in response to the Governor's Education Reform Initiative, the Legislature allocated \$1.3 million dollars to fund 20 new or expanded School Based Health Centers in the Alliance Districts, and two specific projects for new SBHCs in Pawcatuck and Hamden. The Governor's rescission in December 2012 reduced that appropriation for the 20 new or expanded sites by 37%; the two projects for Hamden and Pawcatuck were reduced by half. Just last month, a Request for Proposal was released through the Department of Public Health to fund these new or expanded Centers. The proposals are due in March - but these proposed funding cuts will only allow the new or expanded sites to be open in May and June of 2013 if the Governor's reductions are allowed to stand. The SBHC programs are in a dilemma if they are awarded funding for two months only without any continued funding next year. Surely this was not the intent of the Legislature when you appropriated the funding in the FY 13 budget, nor was it the intent of the Governor's Education Reform Initiative.

With the governor's proposal to eliminate the entire allocation for new or expanded health centers in FY14 and FY15, the continued reduction is being taken from operational funding to currently existing school based health centers.

At the same time that the Governor's budget decreases funding for SBHCs, the state has an urgent interest in the mental health of children and adolescents - a critical function that is addressed in the Centers. Just two weeks ago, I was honored with the invitation to provide testimony to the Mental Health Services workgroup of the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety. In that forum, I explained that for many young people, the School Based Health Center may be their only access to mental health care. Many more schools and communities could benefit from these services. The earlier we can identify and serve youth with mental health needs, the greater our opportunity to avoid the often devastating consequences of delayed treatment. However, the medical component of the SBHC model is where many of these troubled students are identified. Children and adolescents frequently visit the SBHC with non-specific medical complaints -- through proper screening these complaints are frequently identified as a mental health issue and are seamlessly referred to the SBHC behavioral health provider.

While we understand the shared sacrifice we all have to make during these difficult fiscal times, the plan to annualize the rescission paired with the proposed elimination of expanded SBHC funding in the Alliance Districts equals a 15% decrease to the total state funding for the program. Funding reductions decrease direct clinical services - less clinical staff time to assess and treat student health problems and provide preventive care to keep them healthy and in school.

We urge you to avoid these drastic reductions to School Based Health Center services. For so many children and families, the SBHC is their only safety net.

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